

School of Engineering submission to the Fossil Fuel Review Group

Having consulted with the Management Committee of the School (14 academics in addition to myself and 2 senior professional staff), I am writing to present our unanimous view regarding the current discussions being undertaken by the Fossil Fuel Review Group.

The potential negative consequences of any degree of disengagement by the University from fossil fuel-related activity are incalculable, for the School of Engineering and its students, and hence for the University as a whole. Therefore the School of Engineering is deeply opposed to any moves of this type. This opposition goes far beyond any immediate impact upon current research contracts, etc., although we will submit the data requested under separate cover.

Engineering is fundamentally about the practical technology of how human society organises its commercial, political and cultural affairs. As a School of Engineering, it is essential that we:

- (a) prepare our students to engage fully with all of the above aspects of our society,
- (b) explore the limitations of technologies that are currently in practice so as to enable improvements, and
- (c) search for new technologies for future deployment.

These activities are all challenging at a deep intellectual level and are therefore fundamentally legitimate undertakings for a world-leading university such as ours.

All three of (a) - (c) above are intimately interdependent. For example, without research of type (b) above, then we would not be considered credible when bringing forward any potential solutions identified in type (c) research; similarly, if we cease to attract the very brightest students - (a) above - our efforts in (b) and (c) would be blunted.

A huge fraction of our society's activity is founded upon the extraction, manufacture and deployment of fossil fuels. The School of Engineering at The University of Edinburgh attracts the brightest students from across the globe specifically to study leading-edge engineering technology and its industrial practice, including that relating to fossil fuels. Our staff are engaged in world-leading research activities that are actively contributing to the solution of problems arising from fossil fuel use and the identification of alternative technologies, including some that ultimately could displace the use of fossil fuels. These research topics are very influential in setting the syllabi of our taught programmes, thus providing our graduates with an authoritative grasp of the main issues at stake and the potential of future options for new technology.

The inescapable corollary is that, for entirely academic reasons, the School of Engineering must be intimately engaged with industry, including those sectors concerned with all aspects of fossil fuels.

Many companies participate in our teaching and research activities (e.g. providing industrial project placements for final-year undergraduates; sponsoring PhD projects, etc.) and the business of many of those companies is predominantly in activities related to fossil fuels. Moreover, we are very proud of the achievements of huge numbers of our alumni who work in those companies, and this feeling of pride is generously reciprocated.

The School of Engineering is undergoing rapid expansion at the present time, some of which is intimately connected with fossil fuels, such as combustion engines, and some explicitly directed at alternative technologies, such as renewable energy and biomass conversion to road fuels. It is of the utmost importance that we are seen by industry to be balanced and credible in our approach to these matters.

On behalf of the School of Engineering, I must warn that any moves by The University of Edinburgh towards disengagement from those industry sectors concerned with fossil fuels would fundamentally endanger the future of the School of Engineering, and damage the standing of The University.

Prof. Hugh McCann FEng FRSE

Head of School

25th March 2015